

## MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: After Action Review (AAR); New Orleans District, March 2005 Partnering Conference, New Orleans Louisiana

1. The New Orleans District's (NOD) Third Annual Partnering Conference was held on March 30-31, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The conference was implemented as part of the NOD's continual improvement and customer care process in an effort to develop and nurture partner relations. Approximately 265 persons participated in the conference with an estimated 125 persons representing various partner groups and several persons representing the Corps' Division and Headquarters offices. Partners represented included:

- a. Federal and State Agencies
- b. Parishes and Cities
- c. Levee Districts, Port and Harbor Districts, and other Special Districts
- d. Universities and non-profits
- e. Tribal Nations
- f. Other interested parties/stakeholders
- g. Congressional Offices

Actions were required to plan for and coordinate this conference and are shown below:

- a. Define purpose and expected outcomes of conference
- b. Determine dates and general location
- c. Determine audience size (internal and external)
- d. Select and enter into contract with hotel
- e. Develop invitation and draft agenda
- f. Coordinate with all conference presenters
- g. Review and approve invitation and agenda
- h. Send invitations
- i. Develop registration form
- j. Form support teams
  - a. registration team
  - b. facilitators during breakout sessions
  - c. public affairs
  - d. photo/IMO support
  - e. transportation for internal participants
  - f. powerpoint team during breakout sessions
- k. Coordinate agenda and specific needs with hotel, photo/IMO, and registration team
- l. Send reminder invitations to participants (internal and external)
- m. Phone banking to encourage participation
- n. Secure supplies and awards for conference
- o. Prepare conference handouts and materials
- p. Develop guidance for all support teams
- q. Develop signage for conference to be posted in hotel
- r. Host conference

The above tasks were undertaken and/or managed by New Orleans District's Project Management Team consisting of Messrs. Mark Wingate, Kasey Couture, Durund Elzey of Planning, Programs, and Project Management Division, Western Branch, and Metro Source Consultants, Inc. This document will serve as the formal AAR with supplemental information provided by conference attendees completed on May 20, 2005. This information will be used to shape the scope of future conference. All conference attendees were provided the opportunity to complete a set of after-action review questions. All received replies were compiled on to a excel sheet and is included in this document. If deemed appropriate by the committee the feedback will be implemented into future conferences.

2. Several key features and/or issues have been identified relative to planning for and hosting the subject conference and are shown below:

#### **A. Prepare early in advance**

**Discussion:** Many activities are required to host the subject conference and have been shown above. Although some tasks may be completed in advance of the conference, certain tasks and coordination will continue until the conference begins. Extensive coordination is required between the PM team and each participant. The PM may be required to motivate team members on required "non-project" related efforts. Unexpected events can occur (such as changes in hotel requirements, presenter cancellations, etc.) and must be factored into the overall schedule.

#### **Recommendation:**

- Begin planning process as soon as possible but no later than 4-months prior to conference date
- Secure hotel as soon as possible and invite participants upon execution of hotel contract
- Assemble support teams at beginning of planning events
- Schedule conference during non-holiday season
- Schedule and/or prepare for backup presenter(s) and hotel accommodations
- Order conference supplies

#### **Suggested Action:**

- Setup a meeting with Executive Office in early July 2005 to begin preparations for 2006 conference
- Follow above recommendations as applicable

#### **B. Secure hotel to host conference**

**Discussion:** Without room accommodations there is no conference. Contracting Division plays an integral role in securing hotel meeting rooms and other conference requirements that may be provided by hotel (A/V equip, etc.). PM develops specifications for hotel including number of meeting rooms, size, etc. Ensure lobby and/or adjacent rooms are large enough to accommodate participants while in "break" mode. Invitations must state hotel name and location so participants can secure sleeping rooms as necessary. Invitations should go out a minimum of 2-months in advance of conference. Hotel requires time to meet needs of

conference. Hotel has policies on booking blocks of sleeping rooms to ensure availability and favorable room rate for invitees. Conference is in competition with other conferences for meeting and sleeping rooms. Conference parking should also be considered for Corps and non-Corps personnel. Consider relocating the conference to a more centralized location in an effort to increase sponsor participation.

**Recommendation:**

- Select team member from contracting division to participate in this effort upon completion of July 2005 meeting b/t PM and Executive Office
- Upon defining conference needs and audience size, investigate various hotels in area
- Provide necessary information to contracting to secure hotel
- PM suggests hotel to contracting personnel

**Suggested Actions:**

- PM will request Contracting Div. Personnel following the meeting with the Executive Office Meeting.
- Follow above recommendations as applicable

3. Each conference attendee was afforded the opportunity to complete a questionnaire based upon standard AAR questions. Questions and the respective synopsis are shown below.

**Question 1** - The overall goal of the 2005 Partnering Conference was to educate our partners about the Corps (via Day 1 workshops: Corps 101, Budgeting, Regulatory, Acquisition Life Cycle Management, Project Cooperation Agreement, and Project Delivery) and display the improvements that the New Orleans District has made in becoming a more customer friendly organization. Did the New Orleans District achieve the desired overall goal?

All respondents agreed that the overall object of the conference was met. Conference attendees found that the information provided to be very useful, informative, and relevant. Some response are provided below:

- ✓ “Yes, I feel like this was a successful conference. The breakout workshops were very helpful and informative, and I felt they were an improvement over last year.”
- ✓ “Yes the information provided was very informative. Selection of speakers was impressive and knowledgeable. I left the conference with a better understanding.”
- ✓ “The partners I spoke with seemed please with the conference and thought it was a positive step by MVN.”

**Question 1 a.** - Were the Corps’ partners given an opportunity to actively participate in the conference? What is the appropriate level of participation?

Nearly 98% of respondents’ felt that the level of participation was appropriate and conference attendees were adequately integrated into the conference as it relates to actively participating. Attendees were pleased with the opportunity to actively participate. Below are some common responses;

- ✓ “Yes, being encouraged to ask questions and comment during sessions was an appropriate level of participation.”
- ✓ “Yes, an appropriate question and answer session should be provided for each session.”
- ✓ “Yes, to have an effective interchange of ideas it is necessary to break the participants into smaller groups- which you did- desegregated by topics of interest: Funding, Project/program management, levee districts, state agencies, coastal zones, etc..”
- ✓ “Yes, I believe they were afforded the opportunity to participate in the conference via planned presentations and the breakout sessions, as well as, the chief's panel session. However, we may want to think about rescheduling the chief's panel at an earlier time within the conference. Most participants had departed prior to the chiefs panel (which was the last item on the agenda for the conference) That way, it will ensure that those partners who asked questions will be around to hear the answer.”
- ✓ “Partners were encouraged to ask questions and express any thoughts that may be useful. Everyone was enthusiastic in participating.”
- ✓ “Through various speakers....yes. It might be helpful in the future to have partners from a completed project walk through the process and what level of various cost we in the experiences.”

**Question 1 b.** - Were workshops informative and relative to Corps/Partner initiatives?

Again, nearly 98% of respondents' answered yes. Many stated that valuable and relative information was provided. Overall, respondents seemed please with the quality and quantity of information presented. The workshops were beneficial to all attendees including Corps employees. Below are some common responses;

- ✓ “Yes they were. Being a Corps employee, I felt as if I learned more through the workshops.”
- ✓ “The workshop was very informative. Was given a lot of literature with in-depth information.”
- ✓ “Yes, but again it might be helpful to have a workshop focus on one successful and completed project and walk through it from beginning to end.”
- ✓ “Yes, I learned more than I knew before attending.”

**Question 2.** - If the overall goal of the conference wasn't achieved, what action(s) could have been taken to achieve the desired goal?

Many respondents did not respond to this question due to their positive response to question 1. Attendees suggested finding ways to extend invitation to potential partners, rescheduling the

chief's panel, and conducting timely follows after major Corps events. Below are some responses;

- ✓ “We simply must timely follow up on issues that surface at the conference on which we commit to do so.”
- ✓ “We need to find a way to reach out to more potential partners. The folks who currently don't know what we could do for them.”
- ✓ “Reschedule the chief's panel Q&A session.”
- ✓ “The objective of the conference was achieved. Many partners were in attendance and participated in the open discussions. The only issue would be with the breakout sessions. All of the breakout sessions focused on consistency issues. The briefing at the end of the conference seemed to be repetitive with no clear topics for action being defined.”

**Question 3.** - What could be done differently to improve the value of the Corps' Annual Partnering Conference?

The responses again varied. Attendees suggested reworking the chief's panel, possibly considering relocating the conference to a more centralized location, additional topics of discussion for the workshops/breakout sessions, and consider having more “mini-conferences”. Below are a few of the attendees' suggestions.

- ✓ “The only change I would make to the conference is during the customer/partner comment session (when the questions are address to Corps Section/Branch Chiefs'). I feel the chiefs shouldn't be briefed on the question before hand. Any question that is asked the Chiefs should be more than knowledgeable enough to answer.”
- ✓ “We can build on the workshops, perhaps by getting sponsor input on the subjects they would like to have us address.”
- ✓ “Describing the processes and procedures rules and legislation was most helpful to me. Also, pointing out pit falls that local partners encounter and typical problems that come up - typical misunderstandings of the local partners (were also helpful). Limitations of what the Corps can and can't do.”
- ✓ “Maybe have mini conferences more often.”
- ✓ “The breakout session should have varied topics especially ones that focus on procedural problems with the Corps. The summary of action from the years break out sessions should clearly define what has been done to address our partners' concerns. Recommend a breakout session that focuses on construction relates to issues with out partners instead of focusing on funding and design issues.”
- ✓ “Alternate more centralized location.”

- ✓ “It was very nice and well done. The only thing might be to bring some of the technical topics down to a general public level. Although, that may have been appropriate for others in the audience.”
- ✓ “Would like to see it extended for one more day. A lot was given in the two-day conference. I would like to see more speakers like Mr. Jindal get more involved.”
- ✓ “Elaborate on more specific programs offered by the Corps and discuss them in greater detail.”
- ✓ “I don't know about the Corps all over but here in New Orleans area you all have problems with your attitude toward local partners, (now that is a laugh). Your constructions division makes false statements (LIES) about YOUR PARTNERS. I feel your partnering conference is some rule you have to comply with and not an honest attempt to do the right thing for your partners or the good of the citizens of the United States of America.”

### **Conclusions:**

The subject partnering conference was an overall success. Our partners were very receptive to the changes made from previous conferences. In general, the majority of comments from conference attendees received were positive. They provided valuable feedback that may enhance future conferences. The following issues should be taken into consideration based upon feedback from conference attendees:

- Relocating the conference to a more centralized location as it relates to the district's boundaries
- Revamp the Chief's Panel Session
- Allow Partners to suggestion breakout topics
- Reach out to more potential partners

Key lessons learned included as it relates to planning the conference: 1) securing conference accommodations with appropriate room sizes and other necessary conference services, 2) ensuring partner attendance and partner participation (develop agenda that calls for sponsor(s) to participate in breakout sessions, presentations, testimonials, etc.), and 3) preparing well in advance while providing appropriate direction to all parties and support teams involved including Corps and non-Corps personnel. As stated in the introduction a number of teams were required to successfully carryout the conference. Considerable time and clear guidance/direction was developed by PM and provided to each support team including logistical information such as conference transportation. Phone banking will be used again to solicit a greater participation rate and to better determine actual attendance.

The above information can be utilized for those planning and hosting similar conferences on the magnitude of approximately 250-persons. The NOD's PPPMD, western branch will use the

information shown in this AAR when planning for future conferences. This document will be saved in the folder: <L:\PM\COMMONELZEY\PartneringConference\2005\AAPARTNERCONFERENCE2005>.

**Next Actions:** The following actions will be initiated and completed as a follow-up to the subject conference:

- Recognition via awards including team achievement for District Conference Team
- Revise 2005 attendance list to capture a larger audience
- Meet with Conference Development Team to incorporate comments from attendees into the upcoming conference.

# Appendix A



# *U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Orleans District, 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Partnering Conference*

*"Cultivating Relationships through Education, Collaboration, and Innovation"*

## **2005 After- Action Review**

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This questionnaire is provided to help us better plan for future Partnering Conferences and serve as an After Action Review of the conference. Please complete this form and return it to us by **May 20, 2005** via fax 504.862.2572, email [durund.elzey@mvn02.usace.army.mil](mailto:durund.elzey@mvn02.usace.army.mil) or by US postal mail the address is shown below.

1. The overall goal of the 2005 Partnering Conference was to educate our partners about the Corps (via Day 1 workshops: Corps 101, Budgeting, Regulatory, Acquisition Life Cycle Management, Project Cooperation Agreement, and Project Delivery) and display the improvements that the New Orleans District has made in becoming a more customer friendly organization. Did the New Orleans District achieve the desired overall goal?

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Were workshops informative and relative to Corps/Partner initiatives?

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If the overall goal of the conference wasn't achieved, what action(s) could have been taken to achieve the desired goal?

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2. What could be done differently to improve the value of the Corps' Annual Partnering Conference?

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Please Mail the form to the following address:

CEMVN-PM-W  
Attention: Durund F. Elzey  
P.O. Box 60267  
New Orleans, LA 0160-0267

# Appendix B